

TRAFFIC ARREST PATTERN;
IN CHESTERFIELD, 29% ARE BLACK AND ALMOST 69% ARE WHITE

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Body

Nearly 29 percent of the drivers arrested for *traffic* offenses last year in Chesterfield County were black and almost 69 percent were white, internal *police* records show.

In an effort to gauge whether Chesterfield *police* officers are engaging in *racial* profiling, or arresting a disproportionate number of minorities, county *police* officials analyzed by *race* the department's *traffic*-stop arrests.

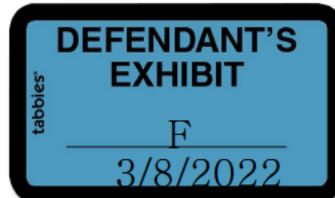
They show that 28.7 percent of the 37,928 people arrested in 2000 for *traffic*-related offenses, including drunken driving, were black. Nearly 69 percent were white.

Chesterfield *police* Chief Carl R. Baker said he's comfortable with those numbers and believes they show his department does not stop and arrest motorists based on their *race*.

"I don't think it will ever be an agency problem here," said Baker, Chesterfield's chief since 1996. "It may be an individual officer problem, but it will never be an agency problem."

Baker said he's not concerned that the *racial* mix of people arrested for *traffic* offenses doesn't mirror the county's *racial* demographics. According to the 2000 census, 76.7 percent of Chesterfield's 259,903 residents are white and 17.8 percent are black.

"That's a horrible assumption - that everybody we stop lives in Chesterfield County," Baker said. "Our daily population is over a million people, so obviously they're not all coming from Chesterfield. Our transient demographics are not the same as our resident demographics."



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The department's review of *traffic* arrest data may be the closest Chesterfield *police* officials come to conducting a so-called *racial*-profiling study. For now, Baker said he has no plans to conduct a formal study of *traffic* stops - unlike several other local law enforcement agencies, including the state *police*.

"I think I can summarize it this way," Baker said. "We get very, very few complaints on biased *policing*. We investigate every complaint. [And] we will continue to monitor our stats as we collect them. But right now, I don't see a problem."

As the issue of *racial* profiling has gathered momentum nationwide, an increasing number of *police* agencies are conducting their own *traffic*-stop studies, requiring officers to record the *race* of all drivers they *pull* over, question and sometimes arrest.

Richmond police had such a study done last year with the help of a Virginia Commonwealth University professor, although *Police* Chief Jerry Oliver was less than pleased with its results. He viewed the study as flawed and based on incomplete data. The study showed that 64 percent of the 2,673 drivers stopped during a six-week period were black, compared with 32 percent who were white.

Similarly, Henrico County *police* conducted their own study last year, also with the help of a VCU professor. Chief Henry W. Stanley Jr. said he was comfortable with the results, which showed that 56.3 percent of the 10,345 drivers stopped during the study period were white, while 38.6 percent were black.

At the urging of Del. Roger J. McClure, R-Fairfax, state *police* Superintendent W. Gerald Massengill agreed this year to begin collecting information on the *race* of each driver his troopers stop throughout the state. The department began collecting the information in May and expects to release five or six months worth of data this fall.

During a recent conference on *racial* profiling sponsored by the state *police* and the Virginia attorney general's office, officials with the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, or NOBLE, urged their law enforcement colleagues to conduct formal *traffic*-stop studies. In their daylong presentation, NOBLE officials said a department's willingness to collect such data has symbolic benefits that can instill public trust and confidence.

"The courage to mandate data collection can improve accountability systems, fortify organizational values, and help 'operationalize' the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics," NOBLE says in its training literature. "Data analysis can be crucial in diagnosing types and levels of bias within an organization, as well as developing systems to remove bias."

The organization believes that "the value of data collection clearly outweighs the associated time or costs," but the group also acknowledges that data collection done poorly or analyzed poorly "can lead to misunderstandings at best and mistaken policies at worst."

Baker said Chesterfield officers do not record the *race* of every driver they stop, but they are required to list the *race* of every driver they arrest - information that is forwarded to the state *police* and then the FBI for crime reporting purposes.

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A category for Hispanic drivers does not exist in the crime reporting guidelines. Therefore, officers record an Hispanic driver as "black" if he appears to be Negroid, or "white" if he appears to be Caucasian.

Some law enforcement officials are reluctant to conduct *traffic*-stop studies because no one has developed comprehensive standards in collecting and analyzing the data. Critics believe many of the studies conducted are flawed and meaningless because they compare only the number of minority stops with some crude overall population measure.

Other criteria need to be factored into such studies, critics say, citing population patterns on roads, *racial* demographics of crime, *police* deployment patterns and *racial* driving patterns, among other things.

The Rev. Gerald O. Glenn, pastor of Chesterfield's New Deliverance Evangelistic Church and an activist in county *race* relations, said the *traffic* and criminal arrest numbers gathered by *police* should be used as a springboard to study the issue in more depth.

"I think it would be in the interest of any progressive law enforcement agency to examine this," said Glenn, former director of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice. "I can say as an *African-American* and a former *police* officer [that] there historically has been in our community a distrust of *police*, and often times when blacks are stopped, they just intuitively think it was based" on *race*.

"And so, to allay those fears, I think any progressive *police* agency would be well versed in saying, 'Hey, we want to get on the front end of this thing before it happens. We want to let you all know that we're concerned enough about the minorities in our communities that we want to allay anybody's fears.' That's being proactive, not reactive."

Kelly E. Miller, vice chairman of the Chesterfield Board of Supervisors, said he's not convinced a formal study is needed.

"I don't believe in just going out and doing studies for the sake of doing studies," Miller said. "There needs to be some basis for why we would do that. And I would certainly want to coordinate with *police* before I made a statement regarding such a study. But at this point in time, I see no need for it."

"I haven't had any complaints made to me in any form that would indicate that there was a problem in Chesterfield County."

MOTORISTS STOPPED

Here is the *racial* breakdown of motorists stopped for *traffic* offenses in Chesterfield County from January 1999 through May 2001:

In 1999, 68.9 percent of the 35,840 motorists arrested were white, 28.6 percent were black, 1.7 percent were Asian, 0.13 percent were native American and 0.53 percent were of unknown *race*.

In 2000, 68.9 percent of the 37,928 motorists arrested were white, 28.7 percent were black, 1.9 percent were Asian, 0.12 percent were native American and 0.20 percent were unknown.

TRAFFIC ARREST PATTERN;IN CHESTERFIELD, 29% ARE BLACK AND ALMOST 69% ARE WHITE

During the first five months of 2001, 68.6 percent were white, 28.8 percent were black, 2 percent were Asian, 0.26 percent were native American and 0.42 percent were unknown.

PEOPLE ARRESTED

Here is the *racial* breakdown of people arrested for criminal offenses in Chesterfield County from January 1999 through May 2001:

In 1999, 64.3 percent of the 20,378 people arrested were white, 35.7 percent were black, 1.4 percent were Asian, 0.19 percent were native American and 0.41 percent were of unknown *race*.

In 2000, 62.9 percent of the 21,321 people arrested were white, 35.4 percent were black, 1.3 percent were Asian, 0.08 percent were native American and 0.25 percent were unknown.

During the first five months of 2001, 61.5 percent of the 9,053 people arrested were white, 36.4 percent were black, 1.5 percent were Asian, 0.08 percent were native American and 0.28 percent were unknown.

Source: Chesterfield County *police*.

Note: Hispanic drivers were lumped into white or black categories, depending on how the officer perceived the driver's *race*.

Graphic

PHOTO

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